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Ban lake drilling, Stabenow urges

Senator unveils plan for federal protection of the Great Lakes

By George Weeks / The Detroit News

MACKINAC ISLAND -- U.S. Sen. Debbie Stabenow, D-Lansing, was expected to call today for federal moratoriums on drilling for oil and gas under the Great Lakes and on the sale or diversion of water from the lakes.

She told The Detroit News she would announce plans to introduce bipartisan legislation next week -- with Sen. Carl Levin, D-Detroit, and others -- for a Great Lakes Initiative that also would include increased funding for Great Lakes research and historical preservation.

"We need a comprehensive approach to Great Lakes problems involving the federal government and the states," Stabenow said. "It really is not either or."



Stabenow

CyberSurvey

Great Lakes drilling

Should a federal moratorium be placed on drilling for oil and gas under the Great Lakes?

yes

no

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Her proposals were applauded by Democratic gubernatorial candidates, who are here for the 21st annual leadership conference of the Detroit Regional Chamber.

"Hooray," said Democratic Atty. Gen. Jennifer Granholm, one of those seeking the 2002 gubernatorial nomination. "If we can't get it done at the state level, Congress should do it."

But Susan Shafer, press secretary to Republican Gov. John Engler, said he

opposes "having the federal camel get its nose under the Great Lakes tent."

His lieutenant governor, Dick Posthumus, who is the frontrunner for the GOP nomination next year, voiced a similar view, reasoning: "If the federal government has the power to create a moratorium, it has the power to take it away."

But former Gov. James J. Blanchard, another Democratic contender, said federal involvement is crucial because the lakes are international waters.

U.S. House Minority Whip David Bonior of Mt. Clemens, also seeking the nomination for governor, was not at the conference. But he said he welcomed Stabenow's legislation because "oil and water don't mix."

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(updated April 17,
2000).

Stabenow was to outline details at a press conference a few hours before Energy Secretary Spencer Abraham, whom Stabenow defeated last year, was to address the conference.

Highlights of the package are:

* A two-year moratorium on new oil and gas drilling, including slant or directional drilling from shore-based rigs. Stabenow wants Congress to order studies by the National Academy of Sciences and the Environmental Protection Agency on whether such drilling poses threats.

U.S. Rep. Bart Stupak, D-Menominee, has demanded an outright ban on Great Lakes drilling.

Engler imposed a moratorium after his Environmental Science Review Board said drilling could be safely done if certain safeguards were implemented. State agencies contend safeguards are in place, and they are considering new permits.

The GOP-ruled state Senate voted Thursday to lift the moratorium. Sen. Gary Peters, D-Bloomfield Township, one of the gubernatorial contenders, led an unsuccessful effort to block the action. He was supported by Sen. Alma Wheeler Smith, D-Salem, a fifth Democratic gubernatorial candidate.

* A moratorium on the sale or diversion of Great Lakes water until Congress approves a regulatory plan being developed by Great Lakes governors and Canadian provincial premiers.

This issue was hotly debated during last year's election campaigns, with Republicans insisting that governors have veto power and Democrats calling for federal involvement.

* Legislation to regulate ballast-water discharges from ocean-going ships in the Great Lakes. Such discharges have introduced zebra mussels and other species that are causing problems.

Stabenow said her legislation mirrors a bill introduced by U.S. Rep. Peter Hoekstra, R-Holland, on ballast discharges.

* Increased federal funding for Great Lakes research, including boosting annual spending from \$25 million to \$100 million for how best to control invasive species.

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